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AUTHOR	Luce, Eric F.
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ABSTRACT

This case study of electronic correspondence and interactions shares some things that seemed to work and some that didn't when a seventh grade remedial reading class chatted online with a university-based professor of curriculum and instruction. The middle school students and teacher became quite interested in this activity. These students were reading and writing even though their tested reading levels were far below grade level. This report illustrates challenges and opportunities that arise when new technologies are used for teaching reading and writing and illustrates one way that technology was allowed to play a role in faculty development and training. If it were not for the existence of a differentiated faculty development and professional performance appraisal system for the middle school teachers, it is unlikely that either the teacher or the class would have gone online. Moreover, without technical assistance from one of the students in the class (who was a hacker), this online adventure would never have gotten off the drawing board. This paper describes a way that was found to address questions over who will train teachers and how time can be found for teachers to learn to use technology to support their teaching and their students' learning. (Author/MES)

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An Online Adventure With BCReading and Wolftrip

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ED 430 529

Eric F. Luce

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Abstract

This case study of electronic correspondence and interactions will share some things that seemed "to work" and some things that seemed not to be considered as "work" when a middle school remedial reading class went "online" with a university based professor of curriculum and instruction. The middle school students (and their teacher) became quite interested in this activity. Moreover, these students were reading and writing even though their reason for being in remedial reading, instead of in foreign language class, was that they "couldn't read." Their tested reading levels were far below grade level.

This report will illustrate challenges and opportunities that arise when new technologies are used for teaching reading and writing. The case presented will also illustrate one way that technology was allowed to play a role in faculty development and training. If it were not for the existence of a differentiated faculty development and professional performance appraisal system for the teachers in the middle school setting neither the teacher nor the class would likely have gone "online." Moreover, without technical assistance from one of the students in the class (who was a hacker), this online adventure would never have gotten off the drawing board. This presentation will describe a way that was found to address questions that often arise over who will train teachers and how time can be found for teachers to learn to use technology to support their teaching and their students' learning.

The Promise and the Predicament

Tremendous expectations are held for the transformation of culture and society by technology. Pervasive is the belief that computers will be where work gets done in the future and that computer users will be the processors of information that will be created, learned and communicated. (Winik, 1997)

Instructional technology it is believed will transform schooling and learning. A decade ago, computer literacy for many teachers might have meant having access to computers in school settings and knowing how to turn them on and off. Now, the rush is on to have internet access in all classrooms. In many schools, computers were plunked down in classrooms and this was called access. A computer in every classroom was a goal. Now, dedicated phone lines with modems or networked systems represent access while many classrooms have no telephones if only for school security and safety uses.

Many arguments are martialled in favor of using technology in schools Two of the most common are that this will better prepare students for the world of work and motivate students to learn. While these are worthy objectives they do not readily evoke ways that technology will or can transform instruction, nor do they provide clues as to how or whether technology can add instructional value. It is easier to learn about new technologies, than it is to learn how to teach making use of new technologies so that

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instructional value is added.

What are the realities of technology in education? One reality is that too many overhead projectors sit on shelves around the country because of burned out bulbs that no one knows how to replace. Another is that while questing for the silicon classroom, school districts are rushing to spend billions of dollars on computers and it is not clear that they really know what to do with them. Until teachers are as comfortable with computers as they are with blackboards, or there may be a lot of money wasted. (Kaplan and Rogers, 1996)

The larger problems related to classroom computing have to do with how to make the best use of computers and, more fundamentally, what students are to learn with and about them. Computer literacy may not necessarily result in more traditional literacy. Navigating the net, hunting and gathering, is not the same thing as knowing how to organize and effectively present information. Desktop publishing does not necessarily result in better writing. (Kaplan and Rogers)

Time is also a problem. Students may have more time than teachers to learn about technology if they have parents who can keep them up to date supplied with the latest hardware and software and if they have an interest in it. Teachers must work from "bell to bell" and have responsibilities outside of school as adults on limited budgets of time and money at home. Staff training in schools for learning new technologies is rarely available in ways that are common in the world of business. Putting the work of schooling on the back burner while teachers are tutored on technology is not widely considered to be an option. (Robinette, 1996)

Daring to put technology to use is risky behavior for teachers. Available technology may be unreliable, or out of date. Students may know more about computing than their teachers. Success in integrating technology in the processes of teaching and learning is hard to measure and quantify. If it is fun to use computers in school, will it also count as work? Teachers must wonder whether fun and fundamentals can be combined in an age of accountability measured by student performance on standardized tests.

It takes time to learn how to use different technologies and to integrate them into instructional activities. What does that learning curve look like? Is it a pretty sight? Will it be considered to be teaching which results in learning at all if such efforts are not immediately recognized as being successful? Until teachers and teacher educators are comfortable with new technologies, it may be unlikely that there will be many gains for students or improvements in schooling which result from access to computers or the internet. Also, who will teach the teachers and the teacher educators how to use new technologies to support teaching and learning? Are they largely on their own to sink or swim with whatever technology is available to them?

Differentiated Professional Performance Appraisal and Professional Development

This case study of electronic correspondence and interactions will share some things that seemed "to work" and some things that seemed not to be considered as "work" when a middle school remedial reading class went "online" with a university based professor of curriculum and instruction. The middle school students (and their teacher) became quite interested in this activity. Moreover, these students were reading and writing even though their reason for being in remedial reading, instead of in foreign language class, was that they "couldn't read." Their tested reading levels were far below grade level. It will also illustrate challenges and opportunities that arise when new technologies are used for teaching reading and writing.

One solution to the problem of supporting the professional development of teachers who seek to learn to use new technologies to support their work with students might involve the adoption of a differentiated professional performance model such as that being tried in the Lower Merion School District in eastern Pennsylvania. In Lower Merion where the professional staff is highly experienced and mature, it is possible for teachers to propose a professional development plan as an alternative to more traditional forms of professional performance appraisal, such as the oft-dreaded, but obligatory programs of formal classroom observation by administrators and supervisors with which teachers are so familiar. While this may not solve all problems related to the provision of time and training to support the integration of new

technologies into teaching and learning activities, a differentiated professional performance plan can legitimize teacher experimentation, inquiry and research in uncharted territories, such as the internet, which seem to offer so much educational promise.

One middle school reading teacher in the Lower Merion School District reported on her experience this way:

What a wonderful journey! When it took two months to get an internet account I was concerned, but it has been informative educational, and fun!
The reading teacher had to start her journey by reading, of course! **Kidnet: The Kid's Guide to Surfing Through Cyberspace** by Debra and Brad Schlepp was a great way to begin. The book is designed for children ages 9-13 and is filled with information about getting online and describing the sites that would be of interest to this age group. It also spoke of what to look out for and some etiquette for online behavior. I couldn't wait to try out some of the sites only to find that I couldn't figure out what to do. So on to the next book! Internet for Kids! A Beginner's Guide to Surfing the Net by Ted Pedersen and Francis Moss was just what I needed. I went with Cybersarge through the Cyberspace Academy and felt somewhat better about surfing the net. The book is written for middle school age kids and is a very clear description of how to surf and what the rules are in cyberspace. If I could understand, it must be clearly written!
What really got me moving was one of my students, Jon Wolfe. He was very excited to see that we had America On Line in the class and taught me much about it. For Jon the whole thing was so simple that he couldn't believe I could be wary. He sat me down and gave me some hands on instruction that was very helpful. From then, he began writing to my husband online and then his whole class was corresponding with him. From there, Eric's graduate level Secondary Education Curriculum class was writing to the class. It was an interesting experience for all of us. The kids did tire of it but the experience was good. They couldn't wait to read their messages and the concern over their grammar and spelling was amazing!
Classroom management was difficult, who would get on first and so on. . .

The story that follows illustrates how email was integrated into the curriculum and activities of a seventh grade remedial reading class. This was an unanticipated outcome that came about as a reading teacher worked through her professional performance appraisal project. The work outlined in the original approved proposal was performed as well. That plan had been for the teacher to first learn how to logon to and navigate the internet in order to identify new ways that English as a Second Language (ESL) students might be better supported in the school. From the teacher's perspective, the results from that part of the project were somewhat disappointing.

From: WolfTrip
Subj: School
To: EFLuce
Dear Dr. Luce
I am Jon from you wifes class I am at home now my screen name is Wolftrip and I just wanted to say hi because I got borred. Talk to you next time in Mrs. Luce's class.
Sincerely,
Jon Wolfe

Date: Fri, 22 Mar 1996 00:33:41 -0500
From: EFLuce
To: WolfTrip
Cc: Bcreading
Subject: Re: School

Jon:
Thanks for writing. I get bored sometimes too. However, I think that this is really exciting that you are helping Mrs. Luce to learn how to get around on America on Line and showing both of us how we can have an online conference between your class at school and my office at the university. I hope that my students learn a few things when they are with me even if it is only that they have a few lessons that they can teach me and that I am open to learning something new. When that happens school just seems to come alive.

I hope that you receive this reply at home, but also that a copy of it arrives at school tomorrow for y'all to read and then write back to me.
Sincerely,
Dr. Luce

I must admit that I didn't find that much to get ESL students hooked on, but there were some sites that would be good and many sources for pen pals who are also ESL students. This would probably be a great way for these students to share experiences and perhaps not feel quite as isolated.
Many of the sites that I did find gave helpful hints for teachers who have these students in classes. There were ongoing dialogues about ESL and programs that work and many discussions of educational philosophy in relation to language acquisition. I must admit that I hadn't thought about Krashen in a long time!

The unanticipated outcomes from that teacher's professional development plan proved to be much more exciting and they became part of a winning formula that met with student enthusiasm and interest,

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parental support and endorsement, as well as administrative interest and approval. Good teacher's plan carefully for instruction, but they also are alert and make the most of unanticipated outcomes. If it were not for the existence of a differentiated faculty development and professional performance appraisal system for the teachers in the middle school setting neither the teacher nor her class would likely have gone "online." Without technical assistance from one of the students in the class (who was a hacker), this story of an online adventure could not be told. Nonetheless, if this story is to represent the transformation of education, it will be necessary to ask whether this story is just beginning or at an end.

WolfTrip

Things sure did come alive for a while. This correspondence and collaboration began on my semester break when I visited my wife's class to help her with her internet project and to recharge my batteries in a real secondary school, BCMS, where my wife is a middle school reading specialist. I am an assistant professor of curriculum and instruction with responsibilities for supporting and advising secondary education teacher education students.

It had taken a while to get an internet account created by the supporting academic computing unit for the middle school. Once the account name and password had been generated, a dedicated phone line had to be installed and a modem delivered. By the time of my break, the modem and the phone line were available. However, the modem still needed to be connected and communication software needed to be installed on the computer. I said that I would help. After all, I was partially responsible, or to blame, for this project. I had encouraged my wife to choose the professional development performance appraisal option. Now, she not only wanted to get on line. She also needed to be and she needed some help to do it. This was all new to her.

While touching base with the school's computer specialist about the modem and about the school's internet access, procedures and policies, it was learned that a mini-grant supported school access to America on Line for special projects. A logon name, BCReading, and a password was generated to support this professional development effort. Thus equipped, the professor returned to the reading room to set up the modem for use with the classroom computer and to show the reading teacher, his wife, that she could get online and complete her proposed work.

It was after the modem had been installed, but during the installation of the AOL account that I first noticed WolfTrip, or Jon as he is known by most people in everyday life. He had come to reading class and was quietly, but intently, watching me as I quietly, but intently, worked to get the classroom online. After about five minutes, he approached me with a host of questions fired in staccato fashion. He thought it was cool that the classroom might be equipped for AOL. He had an AOL account himself. He surfed there all the time. His questions came so fast my head was spinning. I was grateful that the class had other work to do so that I could finish up the installation and convince myself that this work station was ready for the reading teacher. She was relieved that the system seemed to work. She was interested in Jon's interest in AOL and in the computer. She was a bit apprehensive about what to do next, but that didn't last long because WolfTrip took the lead.

Shortly after my academic break ended, I received a phone call from the reading room at the middle school. There had been a request. Jon wanted to know if the class could "chat" online with me. I said that I thought that could be arranged. When did they want to do this, I asked. The answer was now.

To do this, I needed to turn on my computer and logon to AOL. This took a bit of time. I also had to follow Jon's directions for how to chat since I had not done this before, nor had the reading teacher. Jon told me, "Logon to AOL. Go to People Connection. Look for Rooms, then look for Private Rooms." This was beginning to be a bit frightening. We were out of control. What would we bump into on the way to Private Rooms?

"When you get to Private Rooms, look for BCReading. We will look for you. What is your login? We will look for it."

It took most of what was left of the time the class had that day for our first online encounter to occur, but

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BCReading and EFLuce did meet in the Private Rooms and chatted. Everyone got a brief turn--Phil, Matt, Arin, their teacher, and of course, Jon. It all happened so fast and it was over before we had hardly begun. No hard copy of that correspondence exists because it was so unexpected and so new an experience for all of us, but Jon. Besides, there was not enough time to think about a hard copy since the bell had sounded at BCMS and the class had to be off to their next destination. I was calculating my online time and estimating my next AOL billing in my head. Later on, I thought about the value of a transcript of our session and made sure that I knew how to prepare one in the future.

It did not take long before the class wanted to chat again. Apparently, with Jon's help and prodding BCReading had put together an email message that they had sent to me that included questions for me to answer. Jon and the class also wanted to chat with me online again. Jane, my wife and their teacher, called me by telephone and asked if I could go online with them. The class really wanted to "chat." This time I was ready and while it took a while for my computer to boot up and to logon to AOL, once again I met with BCReading in a People Connection Private Room.

Bcreading: Hello we are here
EFLuce: I am here too!
Bcreading: This is Arin the one who was sick yesterday
EFLuce: I haven't really done this before so I have to be able to type well, but also know where to type.
Bcreading: I read Mrs. Luces letter from you to her and I am ready to answer some of your questions
EFLuce: What is the weather like up there? It is really crummy here today--rainy and damp.
EFLuce: Fire away!
EFLuce: Who is working the keyboard?
EFLuce: Cam you all see the screen in that little room?
Bcreading: Up here it is probably in the 30's and very cold it is like a whole nother winter
Bcreading: Arin is working on the key board sorry I am so slow
EFLuce: Who is there aside from Arin and Mrs. Luce?
Bcreading: Phil, Matt, and Jon do you want to talk to them now?
EFLuce: Are Phil, Matt and Jon there?
EFLuce: I will talk to anyone who wants to get on the computer.
Bcreading: You will get my other letter today when you get mail
EFLuce: Probably that is everyone, right?
Bcreading: Ok well see ya. Matt is coming onto the computer please respond to my letter Bye
Bcreading: Hi
EFLuce: Good, I will look for it tonight. I will have to keep marking papers after we finish with this.
Bcreading: Hi
EFLuce: Who is there now?
Bcreading: I am going to Savannah G.A.
EFLuce: Is that Matt who is going to Georgia?
Bcreading: yes
EFLuce: What is going on in Savannah, Georgia?
Bcreading: My grandparents live there
EFLuce: That is a question that you had to think about I guess, or is typing something that you are still lear. . .
Bcreading: what
EFLuce: Are you still there? I got a gong sound that stopped my last sentence.
Bcreading: yes
EFLuce: How many of you know how to type? Did you take classes in it or have you just learned it on your own?
Bcreading: Phil is going to get on now
EFLuce: Hi Phil!
Bcreading: Yes I take typing lessons
EFLuce: Are you all behaving yourselves today?
EFLuce: What is the band playing in the next room?
Bcreading: yes, of course
EFLuce: Do they have their instrument cases cluttered in the hall? If so, watch your step on the way out!
Bcreading: yes
EFLuce: Is that still you Phil?
EFLuce: Have you eaten lunch yet?
Bcreading: yesIwant to talk
EFLuce: Do you eat the school lunch or do you bring your own? Or, do you skip lunch altogether?
Bcreading: Do you like the sixers
EFLuce: Fire it up Phil!

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EFLuce: Yes. But they are pretty pathetic this year even after trading Bradley.
Bcreading: The coaches son goes to school here.
EFLuce: If they had only drafted Brad Daugherty years ago they would have had a center to build around.
Bcreading: Jon is going on now
Bcreading: Hi Dr. Luce
EFLuce: Lucas' son? I think he is a good coach. Has the team been sold to Comcast yet?
EFLuce: Hi Jon!
Bcreading: Hi
EFLuce: How much more time is left in your class?
Bcreading: 10 minutes
EFLuce: Is this fairly interesting?
Bcreading: yes
Bcreading: How is the wheather down there
Bcreading: did you get any flood
EFLuce: I haven't done a whole lot with online services doing this. The weather is WET and on the cool side.
Bcreading: When class is over Mrs. Luce is going on.
Bcreading: Mrs. Luce is going on I will e-mail you soon
EFLuce: I hope that you all keep writing to me, but make sure to get your other work done!
Bcreading: This was good but not a lot of work went on in class
EFLuce: Doesn't this count as work?
Bcreading: Yes it does but not when we are all standing around . . .
Bcreading: bye bye!!! From all of us
EFLuce: Ok, that is probably the best thing to do. Compose off line and then put your messages out
EFLuce: Bye.
Bcreading: bye
EFLuce: over and out!
Bcreading: we are leeving now
EFLuce: Me too!

Afterward, the class wrote to me by email about being online. They were very excited. The sessions online had been interesting, but confusing. Everyone wanted a turn at the keyboard and electronic messages passed each other seemingly before they all could be responded to or answered. By printing out transcripts of the online conversations, we all became more aware of our typing accuracy if not our spelling ability. A stage of relationship building had begun with the class and WolfTrip was the facilitator.

Arin and Jon turned out to be "techies" while Phil and Matt were into sports. Arin and Jon enjoyed being online whether in chat sessions or in the exchange of email that usually revolved around the ways that they or their classmates and families were using computers. Phil and Matt mostly wanted to talk sports. Phil was up on how all of the professional teams were doing and wanted to know what I thought about their play. Matt was a soccer player, as I had been at his age, and took the subject of his play very seriously. With Arin and Jon I could exchange email about how they were using computers in and out of school and what they liked to do with them. With Matt I could exchange email about soccer and how he and his indoor team were doing. If I misunderstood something that Matt thought that he had told me, he would make sure in no uncertain terms that I understood his view of things, for example that he was not only a goalkeeper for his indoor soccer team, but that he also scored goals as a midfielder, sometimes several goals a game. Phil never quite forgave me when in one early email letter to the class I seemed to have responded to everyone but him. As a result, I almost always had to remember to address messages to members of the class taking pains to respond to Phil first.

One evening when I had gotten in late from my office and had logged on to my AOL account and was responding to a piece of email from BCReading, I was surprised by a "splash" across my screen. It was WolfTrip who had discovered that I was online and he had known how to contact me. He wanted to have a chat in one of the People Connection Private Rooms. This too was an unanticipated outcome.

Since it was 10 pm Central Standard time (11 pm Eastern Standard time), I was tired. I also was not sure that I should be having a private online chat with one of my wife's students at that hour even if he was our best internet consultant at that moment. I made some excuses to WolfTrip about having a long day and needing to finish up my email letter to his class. Could we chat online some other time? Not a problem, he replied.

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When WolfTrip broke in and suggested an online chat a new set of issues came into focus. It seemed important to contact his parents, and possibly the parents of the other students in the class, so that they were formally notified that their children were doing some reading and writing online using email and that this was one activity that was being integrated into the work of the class. While the school principal was aware that this teacher and her class might be exploring internet resources, it also seemed even more important to keeping the administration informed about these activities both because it looked as if they might spill over into out of school contexts, but also because when the class went online the students were crowded around the computer terminal monitoring the sessions. This was not a traditional snapshot of what reading class usually looked like. It was important that there be agreement that this activity be considered as being "on task."

In the end, the principal was delighted that these students were reading and writing online. Her only wish was for more students to have this experience in school. When contacted and informed about the BCReading's online adventures and about WolfTrip's recent nocturnal "surfing" encounter, his parents too were very supportive. It turned out that he had permission to go online and to explore the internet on his own. They were pleased to know that he was able to use what he knew about navigating the "net" in school and happy that this seemed to be influencing him to want to come to school more than was sometimes the case.

The next email message from BCReading seemed to confirm both that we had just had a narrow escape from potential trouble, and that we were onto something that seemed to offer the remedial reading students motivation to engage in authentic reading and writing.

```
Subject: hi
Sent: 3/25/96 11:08 AM
Received: 3/25/96 10:36 PM
From: Bcreading
To: EFLuce
CC: Bcreading

Dear Dr. Luce
I had fun talking to you on-line the other night. I can see how you got tired. I just had nothing to do
and I saw that you were on-line so I sent you an instant message. My parents saw one of the messages on
the computer and thought that I was talking to a strange guy but I told them that it was Mrs. Luce's
husband. You can still send me messages on-line so it is ok.
Fondly,
Jon

Dear Dr. Luce,
I do play outdoor soccer. I don't play goalie. I play midfield. The indoor games are only 25 minutes
long. In one game I scored four goals. I don't wear pads in goal. I get rug burns.
Matt

Dear Dr. Luce,
I wanted to Know if you Like Watching basketball. Did you watch the L.M game? How about football? Do you
like that? Are you an Eagle fan?
From Phil

Dear Dr. Luce,
Thank yo for writting back to me. It was nice to read mail instead of doing work. It was deightful.
Please write back. On Friday I am missing school to go to Washington D.C. I am so excited. Have you evr
beento Washington D.C. before? I havn't. I am going to get a book out of the library so I know where to
go. But I Am coming back on Monday to finish the last day of school before break. Where are yo goig for
break? Anywhere you havn't been before? Please tell me all about it when you come back. I can't wait. How
many classes have you taught today? Was it boring? What are yo doing tonight? have you ever been to FL?
My dad just came back from his vacation visiting my grandmom and step grandpa. They really live in NJ but
they have a house in FL so they can see my cousins in Coral Springs. Talk to you later. Please write
back!!!!!
~Arin

Dear Eric,
Were they ever excited to get your messages! I printed them out so that they could read them and think
about what to write, then we went on with class and each one responded! I'll call Jon's parents this
afternoon.
Love,
Jane
```

Aside from technological literacy and responding to and tapping student interests, this activity seemed to offer an opportunity to make writers and readers out of these students, rather than for them merely to be

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students who wrote and read just to comply with adult demands. Yet, as Arin's posting reveals email was viewed by the students partially as an escape from reading, writing and schoolwork. They were using skills of decoding and encoding. The importance of spelling and grammar was now evident to them as they reviewed the printouts of their online sessions. The importance of composition as part of the writing process seemed to them more and more to be part of getting it right when they communicated using email and the content of the mail they were sending and receiving was rich.

Nonetheless, they also seemed to feel that they were getting out of work by going online. They didn't always see this activity as really being schoolwork. It was too much fun. Jon wrote:

```
Dear Dr. Luce,
Thank you for responding to me. Maby sometime in class or at my house we can go into reading in People
Connection. I have a lot of fun talking to you on line. I don't know anyones screen name except yours.
Good luck on grading those papers. I think that it is really cool that we can talk to you in class. Don't
tell Mrs. Luce but it takes time off class time.
Fondly,
WolfTrip
```

Classroom management issues emerged. The students all wanted to get online at the same time and this was a situation where there was one computer that was being shared by four students. This correspondence and relationship would have been even more of a challenge to manage if the computer/student ratio had been higher. Even with a favorable student/computer ratio, it was hard to rely on technology to carry the full weight of an effective instructional program. Sometimes it was unreliable and hard to count on when needed. Jane wrote:

```
Dear Eric,
Today was difficult. We had trouble with AOL loading, the whole thing just froze. Jon did some
adjustments on the hard drive. For some reason there wasn't enough memory. We turned off the computer and
got back on later. What do you think happened? Don't forget Phil, he is feeling left out. You even forgot
his name on the last correspondence. He can be touchy anyway. I still don't have the system down pat!
Talk to you later.
Love,
Jane
```

Phil never really ever got over the feeling of having been skipped over in the first round of email messages.

```
Dear Dr. Luce,
Your response to my last letter never came. Here's what I wanted to Write. I wanted to know if you liked
to watch the Eagles. Who is your favorite player? Do you like the Phillies?
I know they are not very good but they may be better this year.
Please write back this time to me.
From Phil
```

Moreover, familiarity eventually seemed to breed boredom. As the activity of reading and writing email became routine, it began to seem more like work to the students and their adult partners. There was a point where the students and the adults involved in this activity began to wonder what was the point of being online and where was this activity going? This was evident first in an observation about the students reaction to my questions about their posting of a book review on the Electronic Schoolhouse Bulletin Board. Jane observed:

```
They really are on to the next thing but your questions to them are good - to make them think about the
purpose of the questions or why the author used questions as a way to move the story. Maybe you can take
some of their examples and go from there
```

Later, when my Secondary Education Curriculum and Instruction Students entered into the correspondence with BCReading, the goals and purposes of being online were further called into question. One of my graduate level teacher education students wrote:

```
Hey Guys! It was great getting your letters although I have to admit that it is a little weird writing to
folks that I don't know.
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BCReading concurred:

```
Dear Friends,
We think it is weird to write to people we don't know also!
```

Transformation or Just Another Trend

In concluding her report on her professional performance project, the reading teacher wrote:

```
I have really just begun my relationship with the internet. Time is a problem. The best time to get onto
Lower Merion's system is after 10 pm when I'm not at my best. I am looking forward to being able to hone
my skills this summer and to being able to incorporate the Net into my classroom on a more regular basis.
Thanks for this wonderful opportunity.
```

Over the course of this online adventure, it became clear that computer access was not the solution to all the educational challenges that this reading teacher and her students faced. Nonetheless, having access to a computer, the internet and email in this middle school setting did result in new forms of excitement and anticipation while remedial reading students were reading and writing. These were students who have not always felt that way about school reading and writing tasks since one of the reasons why they were placed in reading class was that they all had been identified as performing seriously below grade level according to standard measures of reading proficiency.

Having access to a computer, the internet and email in this middle school setting did help to support the development of new technological and literacy skills and interests for the students and the teacher. The technology made it possible to receive and generate authentic input and output while reading and writing. It also allowed a middle school student to act as a guide and a teacher not just for his teacher, but for a university based teacher educator as well. The generation of authentic input and output might possibly be considered to be school work that is fundamental, even if it also proves to be fun. The sharing of student and teacher expertise might rightly be viewed as collaborative learning. The school district's differentiated professional development model created an opportunity and the motivation that allowed a teacher to make time to try to learn about technology in the hope of improving teaching and learning.

Conversely, it would be hard to demonstrate that the academic achievement of Arin, Phil, Matt and Jon was transformed in the short run by the introduction and use of new technology in their classroom. In the long run, it is too soon to know what the outcomes from this activity might be.

Planning to use the available technology was logistically challenging since there was only one teacher, one terminal and four interested students. Even with this somewhat favorable student/teacher/technology ratio, technological access, support, and time for use and learning were limited. If the internet practices that were tried with this class were to be more successfully integrated into the curriculum, the culture of computing in the school might be challenged, the status quo upset and conflicting demands for technological access and support might not easily be reconciled.

Teachers would still need to have or find time to learn how to use new technology themselves if they are to be expected to make good use of it with their students. Also, as the experience of working with BCReading and WolfTrip shows, new instructional technology in the classroom may be an answer, but not "the" answer, for engaging student interest. Eventually the BCReading students grew tired of tending to their email and returned to some of their other work. An online conversation with BCReading near the end of the school year after a lapse in contact of more than one month illustrates that new instructional technologies might work best as options to be exercised with discretion, rather than as the center of all learning activities.

```
Bcreading: please go into the private room called Bcreading
EFLuce: OK
Bcreading: cool!!!
EFLuce: Yeah!
Bcreading: where are you?
EFLuce : Here I am!
EFLuce : Where are you?
```

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Bcreading : We have been waiting. what took you so long!
Bcreading : Arin is now on
EFLuce : I know. It took a long time. Hi Arin!
Bcreading : hi Dr. Luce how are you doing\
EFLuce : Ok. Long time since we chatted/met like this!
Bcreading : how is the weather it is about 80 here. it's a very noce day
EFLuce : You read my mind! It is about 90 here and sunny.
Bcreading : it isn't as boring because we haven't been on for awhile. . .
```

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